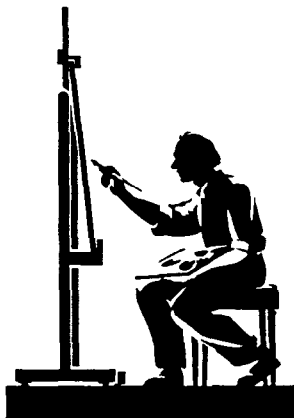




Responding to the Arts



Compiled and Edited by Judy Sizemore
Writer-in-Residence

The Kentucky Arts Council

Gerri Combs, Executive Director
1998

An Agency of the Arts, Education, and Humanities Cabinet

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Introduction

Through its Arts in Education program, the Kentucky Arts Council places outstanding, professional artists in classrooms to collaborate with teachers on arts projects in a variety of media. Teachers have often requested lesson plans that would give them ideas for extending the residency experience and making direct connections to the Core Content for the Arts and Humanities.

The Kentucky Department of Education's Core Content Guidelines for the Arts and Humanities identify three strands in arts education: creating, performing, and responding. This approach allows students to develop a true appreciation for the arts by providing them with hands-on arts experiences as well as the opportunity to reflect on their own creative work and the work of others.

The ability of students to articulate their response to the arts is enhanced by their participation in creative and performing arts processes. Similarly, the creativity and performance skills of students are enhanced when students are regularly engaged in articulating their response to the arts using appropriate terminology and accepted standards. Response is most effective as a learning tool when it is integrated directly into the creative process.

Asking students to write about the arts critically or analytically is the most common method of eliciting a response to the arts, but it is not the only method. Students can also respond to the arts through oral discussion, creative writing, or another art form. Oral discussions are particularly important as a precursor to written response. Classroom discussions give students a chance to formulate and express ideas and hear the ideas of others. They help students develop concepts in the arts as well as building vocabulary.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide residency artists who work in classrooms as well as arts specialists and classroom teachers with specific ideas for addressing and integrating the strands of arts education with a special emphasis on responding to the arts. The booklet is divided into sections by discipline, but many activities are cross disciplinary and lend themselves to integration with other curriculum areas. Likewise, although the activities are recommended for specific grade levels, most can be easily adapted for older or younger students. Artists and teachers can use the lesson plans exactly as they are presented, or they can use them as a springboard for developing their own creative activities. Residency artists may want to share these activities with teachers to be used as pre or post residency activities. They might also want to prepare lesson plans based on their own activities using this format.

Writing about the Arts

There are countless examples in the real world of writing about the arts - theater reviews, curator's statements, how-to articles, editorials, advertisements, artist profiles. Written response to the arts can also take the form of poetry or fiction. The arts can be *interpreted* through writing as well as *analyzed*. Even giving a title to a painting is an example of expressing in written language the essence of an artistic creation.

Many forms of writing have a specific purpose and a target audience. Students will be motivated to polish their own writing if their writing tasks have a real purpose and an authentic audience. You can help students develop an awareness of purpose and audience through frequent discussions of these issues. You can also help them develop a repertoire of writing styles by exposing them to diverse formats and modeling various writing techniques.

You can use this simple formula for creating writing tasks:

"Write a ____ (a) ____ about ____ (b) ____ to ____ (c) ____ to (d)."

(a) stands for the format (essay, personal narrative, critique, feature article, persuasive letter, short story, folktale, poem, play, etc.).

(b) stands for the topic.

(c) stands for the purpose (to publicize, to explain a process, to persuade, to evaluate, to compare and contrast, to entertain, to make people want to see an exhibit, to share and preserve family memories, to express your feelings, etc.)

(d) stands for the audience (the readers of the school newspaper, your friends and family, the governor, children ages 5-10, people interested in home decorating, etc.)

Example: 1. Write a feature article (a) about an art exhibit (b) to persuade (c) readers of your local newspaper (d) to see the exhibit.

2. Write a how-to story (a) about making a mask (b) to explain the process (c) to camp counselors and youth group leaders (d).

Writers often have several overlapping purposes.

Allow your students as much personal choice as possible in writing assignments. You might choose to assign the format and topic, but allow students to select their audience and purpose. Or you might assign the topic, purpose, and audience, and allow students to select their own format. Allowing students to make these decisions increases their sense of ownership of their writing and also enhances their understanding of the elements of writing. Whenever possible, publish student writing. This may be as simple as delivering a letter or as elaborate as a hand-bound book complete with illustrations.

Students often enjoy writing in groups or with partners. The interaction can help students develop ideas and writing skills. Sometimes it is helpful to let students work in groups to brainstorm ideas but then do their writing as individual pieces. This forces individual students to find their own expression.

Keep in mind that there are two very different types of writing: writing for a specific task and writing for self expression. It is critical that students have the opportunity to experience both types of writing. Awareness of audience and purpose are essential when completing a writing task, but students need some opportunities to write for the sheer pleasure of self expression. They need to tell stories, create images, and express ideas and feelings simply because they are inspired to do so. These pieces of writing quite often develop a purpose and find an audience, but they do not begin as a task. They begin, as do many artistic creations, with a need for self expression.